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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Great Hunger. Ireland 1845-9* by Cecil Woodham-Smith

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tradition, especially St. Thomas Aquinas and Vico, the eighteenth-century philosopher. (Naples was to Cenni the city of philosophy, an image it is well to place against the more familiar picture of *lazzaroni*, sloth and poverty.) Italian liberals adopted Hegelianism for anti-clerical and anti-religious ends; Cenni countered with a political philosophy essentially Thomistic in nature, upholding natural law, right of resistance to tyranny, sovereignty derived from God through the people, religion as a necessary moral foundation of the political order. A Neapolitan autonomist, Cenni drew on Vico in his vision of a nation made up of regional differences harmonized in a unity that would be built on variety, not on monolithic uniformity. In the 1870's and 1880's he took part in a movement of moderate Catholics whose goal was to draw the Church back into the political life of Italy, in opposition to the intransigents. To Cenni the vendetta was a tragedy blighting Italian civic life. His group wished to establish a Catholic political party. They did not succeed in persuading the pontiffs—Leo XIII proved to be as intransigent on this as Pius IX, and the anti-clericalism of the extremists on the other side increased rather than diminished in the 1880's.

The author of this modest but competent book notes that Cenni's circle anticipated the future—a Catholic party, the concordat, and administrative decentralization. Cenni also yearned to heal the breach between modern science and religious faith, which has since largely been accomplished. In his lifetime (1825-1903) these reconciliations were unfortunately somewhat premature. It is difficult to make much drama out of the life of so eminently sensible a man, but students of intellectual as well as political and religious history will find much of interest in this study. A man who could be said to bulk large only in the local arena, Cenni reminds us perhaps most of all how distinguished were the intellectual traditions of his beloved Naples.

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*The Great Hunger. Ireland 1845-9.* By Cecil Woodham-Smith. (London: Hamish Hamilton. 1962. Pp. 510. 30s.)

In 1956, *The Great Famine*, a book of essays edited by R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams, featuring the contributions of a number of specialists, ended the long neglect by historians of an event of unmatched significance in its influence on the direction of the Irish economy and the character and assumptions of Irish nationalism. Reviewers praised this pioneer venture for its valuable information and for its critical evaluations of long accepted opinions concerning the causes of the famine and the role of the British government in famine

relief. But there were complaints that the essays were of uneven quality, that they were not integrated into a coherent story, and that too few conclusions emerged from a wealth of detail. In *The Great Hunger*, Cecil Woodham-Smith tells the story of the worst years of the famine, 1845-1849, and provides the unity of material missing in *The Great Famine*.

Miss Woodham-Smith presents the reader with a useful background on the economic and social conditions prevailing in Ireland on the eve of the famine; an interesting discussion on the origins and nature of the fungus which destroyed the Irish potato crop in 1845, 1846, and 1848; a compassionate account of the results of the crop failure—death by starvation, cholera, fever, and scurvy for at least a million and a half, emigration and exile among hostile strangers in degrading environments for at least another million, and pain, hunger, and destitution for many millions more; a detailed and critical evaluation of the roles played by the government and private individuals in famine relief; a well constructed narrative on the course of Irish politics during the famine, culminating in the pathetic rebellion of 1848; and, finally, a description of the visit of the royal family to poverty-stricken Cork and Dublin in 1849—a frantic gesture to revive Irish trade and morale.

Many Irish nationalists insist that the British government used the famine to solve the Irish Question by exterminating millions of Irishmen. They point to the refusal of the British to marshal the resources of the empire to provide food for its Irish subjects as proof of their thesis. Charles Edward Trevelyan, Under Secretary of the Treasury, the man responsible for the government's meagre relief efforts in Ireland, was inclined to view the potato blight as divine punishment on a wicked and perverse people; and in the darkest hours of the famine, Nassau Senior, a respected economist high in the confidence of the Whig administration, lamented that only a million Irishmen would die from famine-connected causes in 1848—an insufficient number to dent the population problem.

Miss Woodham-Smith has no patience with the anti-Irish British opinion, so well represented by Trevelyan, and she condemns the lack of charity and understanding in the official British response to the famine crisis; but like the contributors to *The Great Famine*, she rejects genocide as a government motive. She attributes the reluctance of British politicians to use the power of the state to mitigate the harshness of the famine to their commitment to *laissez faire* economics. Like other recent famine experts, Miss Woodham-Smith insists that the Irish social and economic systems must share blame with the government for famine casualties. Miss Woodham-Smith and the contributors to *The Great*

*Famine* have demonstrated that British leaders did not anticipate the Nazi design for race extermination, but they cannot absolve them of ideological murder. To an Irishman dying of hunger in the 1840's, it must have been scant consolation to know that he was a sacrifice to the principles of *laissez faire* and self-reliance rather than a victim of racial murder. But before the reader condemns the British government for ideological murder he should examine his own reaction to contemporary federal and state efforts to ease the burdens of the aged, the sick, and the destitute.

This informative and beautifully written book promises to be a classic in historical literature. However, in future editions the author should correct her description of Thomas Meagher as a pro-slavery Confederate general (Appendix II). Everyone interested in the role the state should play in times of disaster, or the consequences of placing the dogmas of economic theory above the welfare of human beings, or in the forces shaping the character of Irish nationalism and the Irish-American personality should read *The Great Hunger*.

LAWRENCE J. MCCAFFREY

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*Irish Federalism in the 1870's: A Study in Conservative Nationalism.* By Lawrence J. McCaffrey. (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society. 1962. \$1.50.)

In this study which is Volume 52, Part 6 of the New Series of the Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, Dr. McCaffrey does a superb job of filling in the gap from 1870 to 1879 in the development of and struggle for Irish home rule. In so doing he establishes a new evaluation of the early years of Irish federalism as well as what appears to this reviewer to be a more honest and thorough appraisal of Isaac Butt's policy of conservatism as opposed to Parnell's philosophy which often led to an alienation of Irish and British Protestant opinion. Whereas Parnell was convinced that Irish nationalism would be more effective and would achieve its ends through a stronger co-operation between the tenant farmers, the Catholic clergy, and the middle class, Butt, a product of bigoted environment among the ascendancy classes, while apprehensive over the possibility of Catholic political influence, felt that it was the attitudes of the Protestant ascendancy in Ireland rather than the Catholic masses that would most likely be a serious challenge to the stability of Irish society and to the government. Butt was convinced that prosperity in Ireland could and should be realized through both economic and religious reforms that would benefit Catholics without at the same time threatening the position of the Established Church.